

More black districts likely

BY MARSHA SHULER

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East Baton Rouge Parish could get a new majority black seat in the Louisiana House when election district lines are redrawn to reflect population shifts over the last decade, House Speaker Jim Tucker said Friday.

Tucker said he could easily see a remap plan that provides for five instead of the current four majority black legislative districts in the area.

In addition, black population gains in the state could mean that there will be more majority black districts at the end of the once-a-decade remap process, said Tucker, R-Terrytown.

Louisiana Legislative Black Caucus chairwoman Rep. Patricia Smith said the increase in minority population across the state is "exciting" as well as the prospects of getting additional representation in both the House and Senate.

"We have been speculating and looking at numbers where those (new seats) might occur. We hope to be able to convince our colleagues that that's the right thing to do," said Smith, D-Baton Rouge.

The Legislature meets in a special session March 20 to April 13 to draw new congressional, legislative and other election districts based on 2010 census data.

Tucker and Smith talked about the prospects on black district gains during a meeting with The Advocate's editorial board. State Rep. Steve Carter,

R-Baton Rouge, chairman of the Capital Area Legislative Delegation, also attended.

Tucker said the loss of population since 2000 in heavily black Orleans Parish will mean the loss of three majority black districts there.

But the losses can be made up in other areas of the state where there are concentrations of black residents, including East Baton Rouge Parish, in the River Parishes and in the Natchitoches, Red River and Claiborne parishes, he said.

Tucker said the House will be able to draw 27 minority districts — the same as exist today — "and maybe more than that."

The House target is to draw 27 minority districts to avoid problems with federal approval on the issue of "retro-

gression" where black representation is diluted, Tucker said.

"When you look at concentration areas we think we can probably get there on the House side," Tucker said.

"There may be the possibility to increase majority minority districts from four to five in the East Baton Rouge area. We are going to be looking at that, working with the (black) caucus and the Baton Rouge delegation on that," he said.

House and Senate committees taking the lead on redistricting are on a nine-city tour getting public comment.

A redistricting public hearing will be held at 6 p.m. Monday on the campus of Baton Rouge Community College located off Florida Boulevard.